

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 HA-05 H-01 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 /028 W
-----024153 311723Z /72
O 311621Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1299

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E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SHUM, TS
SUBJ: CONGRESSIONAL LETTER REGARDING ALLEGATIONS OF GOT
HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST AICHA BEN ABED

REF: STATE 135672

1. UPON RECEIPT OF JONES/CLEAR LETTER OF MAY 8, EMBASSY MADE CONTACT WITH DR. MARGARET ALEXANDER, HEAD OF TUNISIAN MOSAICS PROJECT (SPONSORED BY SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE) WHO IS EMPLOYER OF AICHA BEN ABED. DCM MET WITH DR. ALEXANDER MAY 16 AND MAY 24, AND MEMCON COVERING THESE MEETINGS HAS BEEN POUCHED. WHAT FOLLOWS IS A SUMMARY OF THESE CONVERSATIONS. DEPARTMENT SHOULD KEEP IN MIND, OF COURSE, THAT THESE CONVERSATIONS WERE PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

2. AICHA BEN ABED HAS BEEN EMPLOYED BY DR. ALEXANDER SINCE SHORTLY AFTER HER RELEASE FROM PRISON IN 1974. DURING THE FOUR YEARS THAT SHE HAS WORKED FOR THE PROJECT, SHE HAS HAD LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT THE REASONS FOR HER IMPRISONMENT. TO DR. ALEXANDER'S KNOWLEDGE, AICHA BEN ABED HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING HER RELEASE FROM PRISON UNTIL SHORTLY AFTER THE CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN TUNIS OF JANUARY 26, 1978. WHAT DR. ALEXANDER KNOWS ABOUT THE CASE FROM THAT DATE ON IS
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BASED ON WHAT SHE HAS BEEN TOLD BY AICHA BEN ABED, WHO STATES THAT SHE WAS INTERROGATED TWICE BY THE POLICE WHO ALLEGED THAT SHE HAD WRITTEN A STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR JAILED TRADE UNION LEADER HABIB ACHOUR. SHE DENIED THIS CHARGE AND WAS SUBSEQUENTLY CALLED IN BY THE POLICE A THIRD TIME. THE POLICE STATED AT THAT TIME THAT THEY HAD BEEN MISTAKEN IN BELIEVING THAT SHE HAD DRAFTED THE

STATEMENT AND APOLOGIZED TO HER. AICHA BEN ABED THEN INQUIRED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF RECEIVING A TUNISIAN PASSPORT, WHICH HAD BEEN DENIED HER SINCE HER IMPRISONMENT. SHE WAS TOLD THAT SHE SHOULD APPLY AGAIN FOR A PASSPORT IN "TWO OR THREE MONTHS." AICHA BEN ABED IS HOPEFUL THAT SHE SHORTLY WILL RECEIVE HER PASSPORT.

3. AT NO TIME DID AICHA BEN ABED STATE TO DR. ALEXANDER THAT SHE HAD BEEN TORTURED OR MALTREATED BY THE POLICE DURING HER INTERROGATION. HOWEVER, FOLLOWING THE EMBASSY'S INITIAL INQUIRY, DR. ALEXANDER SPECIFICALLY RAISED THIS QUESTION WITH HER, AT WHICH TIME SHE STATED THAT SHE HAD BEEN TORTURED. DR. ALEXANDER IS DUBIOUS, ALTHOUGH SHE BELIEVES IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AICHA BEN ABED MAY HAVE BEEN "MANHANDLED" BY THE POLICE. ONE REASON FOR HER SKEPTICISM IS THAT AICHA BEN ABED'S SISTER TOLD DR. ALEXANDER THAT FOLLOWING HER FIRST INTERROGATION SHE ARRIVED HOME WITH A BLACK EYE, CUTS, AND OTHER SIGNS OF MALTREATMENT. HOWEVER, ANOTHER AMERICAN EMPLOYEE OF THE MOSAICS PROJECT TOLD DR. ALEXANDER THAT SHE SAW AICHA BEN ABED ABOUT TWO HOURS AFTER HER RELEASE BY THE POLICE AND THAT SHE SHOWED NO SIGNS OF MALTREATMENT. DR. ALEXANDER STATES THAT SHE SUSPECTS THAT THERE HAS BEEN "EXAGGERATION."

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4. ACCORDING TO DR. ALEXANDER, AICHA BEN ABED STATED TO HER EMPHATICALLY, UPON LEARNING THAT INQUIRIES WERE BEING MADE CONCERNING HER CASE, THAT SHE DID NOT WISH ANY APPEAL MADE ON HER BEHALF, AS THIS MIGHT INFLUENCE THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT'S DECISION ON WHETHER TO GRANT HER A PASSPORT.

5. AICHA BEN ABED TOLD DR. ALEXANDER THAT BOTH SHE AND HER HUSBAND WERE ARRESTED FOR BEING INVOLVED IN DISTRIBUTING MATERIAL CONSIDERED SUBVERSIVE BY THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT. IN HER CASE, A BELGIAN CITIZEN HAD CONFESSED TO THE TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES THAT HE HAD BROUGHT INTO TUNISIA A SUITCASE FULL OF MATERIAL TO BE DELIVERED TO AICHA BEN ABED.

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6. THE PUBLICATIONS IN QUESTION WOULD APPEAR TO BE A FRENCH LANGUAGE MAGAZINE ENTITLED PERSPECTIVES OR RELATED MATERIALS PERSPECTIVES WAS PUBLISHED BY THE TUNISIAN GROUP OF SOCIALIST STUDIES AND ACTION, WHICH THE DEPARTMENT HAS INFORMED THE EMBASSY (STATE 130534) SEEMS TO BE A RADICAL MARXIST-LENINIST GROUP ESPOUSING GOALS OF VIOLENT REVOLUTION IN TUNISIA AND, THEREFORE, A PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATION UNDER SECTION 212 (A)(28) OF THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT.

7. AICHA BEN ABED STATES THAT SHE IS MARRIED TO NOUREDDINE BEN KHADER, CURRENTLY SERVING A PRISON TERM FOR CIRCULATING PROHIBITED PRINTED MATTER AND MEMBERSHIP IN AN UNAUTHORIZED ORGANIZATION, AND THAT SHE MARRIED BEN KHADER BY MARRIAGE CONTRACT WHILE HE WAS IN PRISON SO THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE VISITING RIGHTS. DR. ALEXANDER CAN VERIFY THAT FOR SEVERAL YEARS AICHA BEN ABED HAS BEEN REGULARLY VISITING NOUREDDINE BEN KHADER IN PRISON IN BIZERTE. ACCORDING TO DR. ALEXANDER, VISITING RIGHTS WERE SUSPENDED FOR SEVERAL WEEKS FOLLOWING THE JANUARY 26 DISTURBANCES, BUT THESE RIGHTS HAVE NOW BEEN RESTORED, AND DR. ALEXANDER HAS PERSONALLY TAKEN AICHA BEN ABED TO BIZERTE ON VISITING DAYS.

8. IN ADDITION TO OUR CONCERN THAT THE PRIVACY OF AN
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AMERICAN CITIZEN'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH US BE RESPECTED, WE SHOULD ALSO POINT OUT THAT AICHA BEN ABED HAS REQUESTED THAT NO APPEALS BE MADE ON HER BEHALF. IT WOULD APPEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THIS HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE, IN VIEW OF CONGRESSIONAL LETTER TO TUNISIAN EMBASSY REFERRED TO IN REFTEL.

9. SUBSEQUENT TO PREPARATION OF THIS MESSAGE, DCM
SAW DR. ALEXANDER AGAIN TODAY, MAY 31. DR. ALEXANDER
SAID THAT SHE HAD ONE ADDITIONAL PIECE OF INFORMATION.
SHE HAD UNDERSTOOD FROM AICHA BEN ABED THAT SHE HAD
NOT ONLY NOT DRAFTED STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR JAILED
TRADE UNION LEADER HABIB ACHOUR BUT THAT SHE HAD NOT
SIGNED IT (AS REFLECTED IN MEMCON). AICHA BEN ABED
HAS SUBSEQUENTLY ADMITTED TO DR. ALEXANDER THAT SHE
DID SIGN PETITION AND THAT THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY WHY
SHE WAS QUESTIONED BY POLICE, GIVEN FACT THAT SHE HAS
A POLICE RECORD.
MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, ALLEGATIONS, LEGISLATIVE MAIL
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TUNIS03913
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780227-0645
Format: TEL
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978051/aaaaaajw.tel
Line Count: 182
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 7551be92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 135672
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2503258
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONGRESSIONAL LETTER REGARDING ALLEGATIONS OF GOT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST AICHA BEN ABED
TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, TS, US, (ABED, AICHA BEN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7551be92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014